

THE ALMA ENSEMBLE: OUR VISION, MISSION, AND PURPOSE

The Alma Ensemble was founded by flutist Sarah Wardle Jones, clarinetist Michelle Smith Johnson, and pianist Erica Sipes. It was birthed from a desire of the founding members to create music in a way that is empowering and personally resonant. We place a high priority on playing music by other women composers, educating our audiences by creating context for the pieces we select, and challenging traditional performance paradigms that inhibit, rather than enhance, our ability to communicate and connect with an audience. In fact, we chose the name “Alma” because it speaks to our mission on several levels. Because we want to do our part in promoting the artistic work of women, we chose Alma Mahler as our namesake precisely because she could have used the social support that we ourselves, by comparison, enjoy. She is most famous for her relationships with prominent artistic men, but she was a composer in her own right who never received the opportunities of her romantic counterparts. “Alma” also means “nourishment” or “soul” which is something that we endeavor to bring to each performance for ourselves and our audiences.

Practically, this means that we have committed to highlighting at least one female composer on each performance. We also take the time to research and perform works of historical women to increase awareness about their valuable contribution to the field. We also work to develop relationships with living women composers to perform, promote and commission their work.

In each performance we strive to provide context for the pieces we perform. We feel this does a service to our audience as well as the composer. Other educational aspects of our performances are in development as we seek more opportunities to perform for schools and students.

Perhaps most importantly, we want to bring a sense of authenticity to our work. We formed this ensemble because we each had experienced the limitations and artistic sterility of performing music according to convention simply because it was expected of us. Like the women who have come before us, we want to reject expectations that stand in the way of creative expression and upend any performance custom that does not serve our ability to communicate clearly or powerfully with an audience. Our feeling is that the best art creates connection and communication between people. We aim to continually grow in our capacity to draw listeners into the creative process by including unconventional elements into our performances including other art mediums, elements of audience participation, or other genres of music that best suit the creative vision of our presentation.